



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Mark Dihle
Division of Air Quality
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.5188
E-mail: mdihle@nd.gov

Steve Way, On-Scene Coordinator
Emergency Response Program
U.S. EPA Region 8
Phone: 303.312.6723
E-mail: way.steven@epa.gov

State Health Department and EPA Seek Participants for Study To Determine Health Risks Associated With Erionite in Gravel

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are seeking participants for a study measuring the risk, if any, of breathing dust from gravel containing the fiber erionite.

Erionite is a fibrous mineral with some properties similar to asbestos, but is not regulated as a form of asbestos. Like asbestos, erionite may pose health risks to those who breathe in the fibers.

In 2006, the Department of Health and the North Dakota Geological Survey initiated an investigation of naturally-occurring erionite deposits located in rural areas near the Killdeer Mountains, Chalky Buttes and Little Badlands mountain areas in Dunn, Slope and Stark counties. The erionite-containing gravel deposits have been used for gravel sources for rural county roads and other areas for several decades.

“The possible health affects of exposure to erionite in North Dakota have not been studied,” said Mark Dihle, environmental scientist with the Department of Health’s Division of Air Quality. “For this study, we are hoping to recruit people who have 20 or more years of high exposure to dust that contains erionite in western North Dakota. This includes people who have worked in gravel pits, processed gravel, worked on road crews or who drove gravel roadways for a major part of their job. If someone believes they may qualify for this study, we encourage them to apply.”

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: health@nd.gov

Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

The study, which will begin in March 2009, will begin with an initial screening questionnaire. Based on criteria related to employment history, work locations, exposure time and other variables, some people will be selected to continue in the study by completing an occupational and medical questionnaire. Some of these participants will then be selected to have chest X-rays and CT scans. Chest X-rays and CT scans conducted as part of the medical study will be provided free; however, any follow-up medical care that may be identified based on the results in the study would be the responsibility of each individual participant.

People interested in participating in the study can go to www.ndhealth.gov/EHS/Erionite/ for more information and to find the initial screening questionnaire. Interested volunteers should print the questionnaire and mail it back to the North Dakota Department of Health. Interested participants also can contact the Department of Health to have a copy mailed to them directly. The initial screening questionnaires should be completed and submitted to the Department of Health before April 17, 2009.

The Department of Health and EPA are working with medical investigators from the University of Cincinnati to conduct the study. Anyone who qualifies based on the results of the initial screening questionnaire will be contacted by the University of Cincinnati investigators with further information and instructions. All personal information collected through the study will be kept confidential. Results of the study will assist officials in determining potential health risks associated with North Dakota erionite exposure and will be used to make informed decisions about the continued use of gravel containing erionite.

For more information regarding erionite or this study, please contact Mark Dihle, North Dakota Department Health, at 701.328.5188.

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